

WHEN MR. FROG WENT WOOING

Folk-Tale From the South

By SAMUEL MINTURN PECK

SOPHY, the planter's little daughter, had gone down to the negro quarter to see Aunt Milly, the oldest negress on the plantation—Aunt Milly, whose turbaned head was full of stories of birds, reptiles, insects and every living creature that lived in the swamp; and the little girl had scarcely sat down in front of the cabin door and produced her patch-work when a frog hopped from under the sill. Startled, Sophy sprang up with a scream. Then, ashamed of her fear, she sat down again.

Aunt Milly viewed the frog meditatively. "De frog use to walk about lak folks." As she spoke, the frog paused a few feet away as if to hear, and Sophy, resuming her patch-work, awaited the story which experience had taught her was coming.

"Yes, de frog he use to walk about wid straight legs lak folks, an' his mammy dressed him in de finest clo'es, an' kep' a-tellin' him how pretty he was, till when he was growed up, bless Gawd! he 'lowed he was de grandest beau in all de swamp."

"Oh, Aunt Milly! The frog pretty?"

"Dat's what he 'lowed, honey. An' hit's dat way wid lots o' ugly folks. De ugliest pussions I ever sot eyes on never thought dey was ugly—leastways, if dey did, dey 'lowed dey had a sweet voice, or a winsome smile, or some'n or other dat was better'n beauty to please folks wid. Hit's natur, honey."

"Howsomever, as I was a-sayin', de frog thought he was jest about de prettiest thing what ever was born into de worl', an' when he was growed up he went a sparkin'. He dressed hisse'f up in his finest clo'es an' strutted up an' down de swamp, swingin' his cane, an' walkin' his Sund y walk, lak he owned de whole yearth. But, somehow, he couldn't make up his mind which one o' de swamp gals to favor. If he could jest make up his mind, dat would settle hit, for he was dat vain an' biggerty he 'lowed any gal would have him for de axin'."

"So de frog, he strutted roun' an' about de swamp, holdin' his head high, an' glimpsin' all de gals out de corner of his eye. Dar was Miss Mole, an' Miss Muskrat, an' Miss Possum, an' de fiel' mouse's nine daughters; an' he glimpsed 'em all, but didn't none of 'em suit him. Miss Mole, she was mighty slick an' shiny, an' at fust sight he thought she mought do to marry wid. She sholy was quiet, an' never said a word; an' she was bline, an' if so be he married her he mought go on a-beauin' de yother gals same as if he wasn't married. But on de yother han', if Miss Mole was his wife he'd have to live under de groun', an' dat didn't suit him at all. No, he couldn't marry wid Miss Mole."

"An' as for Miss Muskrat, she wouldn't do, kaze she was always a-diggin' in de mud."

"When he come to de nine daughters o' de fiel' mouse, dey all looked alike, an' dey was too teenchy for him. He wanted a wife what would cut a tigger in de worl'. So he pass de fiel' mouse's gals wid a sport, same as if dey was dirt, an' ole Mrs. Fiel' Mouse, who was a-sittin' by de door wid her nine daughters, she hyern dat snort, an' hit made her mad enough to bust."

"Now, de was only Miss Possum lef', an' when he see'd her, de frog, he say: 'I wouldn't marry wid dat E'thing for nothin' an' nobody.'"

"All de mornin' de frog sarched for a wife 'thout findin' anybody to his mind. But when de afternoon

drawed on he come to de aidge o' de swamp, an' dar he seed Miss Lizard, what lived in a corner of de rail-fence 'mongst de shumach an' de black-berry bushes; an' soon's he laid eyes on Miss Lizard he say: 'Dat's de gal for me!' An' he couldn't keep his eyes off'n her. Seem to him dat Miss Lizard was de most beautifullest thing in all de swamp—cep'n his own se'f. She was long an' slim, wid a soft, brown skin an' little feet, an' up an' down her body run de brightest yaller stripes, jest lak gold. An' stan'in' dar de frog, he say ag'in: 'Dat's de gal for me. I can jest see myse'f now a-walkin' for de cake wid

a face since I was borned into de worl'. Jest go down to de creek an' glimpse hit.' "Wid dat, de lizard run off through de dry leaves lak a shuttle through de loom, gigglin' fit to kill herse'f, an' lef' de frog stan'in' dar wid his mouf open."

"Ugly? Is I ugly?" say de frog to hisse'f. "Hit's onpossible!" All de same, he started for de creek whar de snake lived. "He jest 'bleeged to see hisse'f one time, snake or no snake."

"When he got to de water, he leaned over de bank to have a look, an' what he seed made him mighty nigh drap in de creek. Bless Gawd! he was dat ugly he was skeered at his own se'f. An' hol'in' on to a willer limb, he 'gun to cry. De tears fall so fast dey made a splashin' in de creek, an' Mr. Fish he riz to de top o' de water to see what was de matter—if hit was rainin'."

"Now, de fish he hadn't glimpsed de frog since he was a little boy, an' he was mighty curious an' full o' talk. He never seed nobody cry before; for in de creek nobody ever cries or if dey does hit can't be tole, kaze ever'thing's kivered wid water. Howsomever, de fish knowed trouble when he seed hit, an' he say:

"What's de matter?"

"Mr. Fish," blubbered de frog, "I'se jest full o' mis'ry!"

"Is your mammy dead?" axed de fish.

"No," say de frog, "wuss'n dat." Den he tole all his 'stress.

"La, is dat all?" say de fish.

"Ain't hit enough?" say de frog. An' de tears went to splashin' ag'in, an' de fish he got skeered.

"For Gawd's sake, stop!" he say, "or you'll raise de creek an' drown yerse'f. You aint no uglier'n your pappy, an' he got m'ried."

"Dat's so, but he

married somebody as ugly as hisse'f. I wants to marry wid de lizard," say de frog.

"When he hyerd dat word, de fish he swum up close to de frog an' whispered through a bubble:

"If you does what I tel' yer, you can marry de lizard. Jest look at me! I'se all kivered wid silver scales. You ax why? Hit's kaze I swims in de water. Shuck off dem clo'es, an' jump in de creek. If you come a-swimmin' a few times wid me, you'll shine lak de sun—you'll look so fine, nobody can't say no to yer."

"Den de frog he trimbled all over, an' say he skeered o' de snake; but de fish 'low dat de snake was in his hole, an' wasn't comin' out dat day. So, de frog shucked off his fine clo'es, an' jumped in."

"Now hit chanced d't day, after de frog went by ole Mrs. Fiel' Mouse an' her nine daughters, an' snorted at 'em, de ole lady she was so mad she couldn't rest. She jest 'bleeged to take a walk to cool off. Seem lak to Mrs. Fiel' Mouse no widdier wom'n in de whole worl' ever had de trouble what she had. Der was all dem gals o' hern, all twins, an' not a one of 'em married, or 'g'ged to be married, an'—"

"Aunt Milly," interrupted Sophy, "nine children couldn't be twins!"

"Huh? Not twins? Well, if dey wasn't twins, hit was wuss'n dat, for dey was all borned at de same time."

"Oh," said Sophy.

"Yes, ole Mrs. Fiel' Mouse was powerfule feard she gwine have a pack of ole maids on her han's. An' den to be snorted at by dat biggerty as if her family was dirt! Hit was more'n she could stan'." So she went walkin' to cool off. But de fuder she walked de



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dat gal. Bless Gawd! she's mos' as pretty as I is." "Den he kind o' loafed up to de rail-fence, a-twirlin' his handkerchief, an' say: 'Mornin', Miss Lizard.'"

"An' de Lizard, she say: 'La, Mr. Frog, is dat you? Dis ain't mornin', hit's afternoon.' An' she giggle."

"Dat don't make no difference," say de frog, "hit's always mornin' whar you is, Miss Lizard."

"Den Miss Lizard, she peep at him over her fan an' giggle ag'in. She was jest full of devilment, was Miss Lizard, an' she 'low she gwine have some fun. But de frog, he thought she was giggin' kaze she was shy, an' dat made him want her all de more."

"Miss Lizard, what you reckon fotch me out to-day say de frog, winkin' his eye."

"Lawd-a-massy! how can I tell what fotch yer? I don't know what's gwine on in de men's minds," say? Miss Lizard, hidin' behine her fan."

"Miss Lizard, I'se a-lookin' for a wife. I been all over de swamp, an' spied all de gals, an' lo an' behol', you's de onliest one what I favors. Ain't a gal in de swamp can hole a can'le to you, an' I want you to set de day—an' set hit soon. I can't wait long, kaze dem beautiful yaller stripes o' yourn done wrop de 'se'ves all roun' my heart."

"Den, Mr. Frog, you can jest unwrop 'em," say de lizard, tossin' her head. "I wouldn't marry wid you if you was strung wid dimunds. You's de ugliest critter I ever seed!" An' de lizard she laughed from her head to her tail."

"Me ugly!" say de frog, fallin' ag'in a pine saplin'. "Jest look at my straight legs."

"Dat aint nothin'. Dem straight legs o' yourn makes you look lak a ash pertater wid straws stuck in hit. An' your face—bless Gawd! I never seed sich